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(54) **Flexible cuvettes.**

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Description

This invention relates to flexible cuvettes which are used for doing reactions, preferably while completely confined against leakage, and particularly to an improved closure for an access port of the cuvette.

EP-A-0 381 501 describes a containment cuvette which is presupplied and sealed with the reagents necessary to detect selected nucleic acids which are multiplied in the cuvette. In addition, a patient sample is injected through a port which is then sealed by either heat-sealing the plastic around the port or inserting a stopper. As a result, a complete containment occurs, even through the detection stage, so that there is no risk of any multiplied nucleic acid (hereinafter, "amplified" nucleic acid) from straying from the cuvette as an aerosol to contaminate yet-to-be used cuvettes.

Such a cuvette has been very effective in testing for DNA, by allowing PCR (polymerase chain reaction) amplification to be done safely and without contamination. However, a minor drawback exists in that the patient sample port has to be carefully sealed to ensure nucleic acid does not leak out. Whether or not heat-sealing or a mechanical stopper is used, in either case, care must be exercised as otherwise a complete seal may not occur.

Yet another drawback is that temporary seals preventing premature leakage out of a compartment do not always hold.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a method, and features in a flexible cuvette which allow for closure of passages such as those extending from the patient sample port after sample insertion without requiring special care.

More specifically, in accordance with one aspect of the present invention, there is provided a flexible cuvette according to claim 1.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method according to claim 8.

Therefore, it is an advantageous feature of the invention that the access port of a cuvette is easily sealed off simply by attaching the cover that is an integral part of the cuvette.

It is a related advantageous feature of the invention that such sealing as described above does not rely solely on the cover that fits over the access port, but on a pinching effect created in the act of applying the cover.

For a better understanding of the present invention, reference will now be made, by way of example only, to the accompanying drawings in which:-

5 Figure 1 is a plan view of a cuvette constructed in accordance with the prior art;
 Figure 2 is a sectioned view taken generally along the line II-II of Figure 1;
 Figure 3 is a plan view similar to that shown in Figure 1, but of a cuvette constructed in accordance with the present invention;
 Figure 4 is a fragmentary sectioned view taken generally along the line IV-IV of Figure 3;
 Figure 5 is a fragmentary plan view similar to that shown in Figure 3, showing a cover in place on the access port;
 Figure 6 is a sectioned view similar to that shown in Figure 4, but of a second embodiment of the invention;
 Figure 7 is a fragmentary plan view similar to that shown in Figure 3, but illustrating a third embodiment of the invention;
 Figure 8 is a fragmentary plan view similar to that shown in Figure 1, but illustrating a fourth embodiment of the invention;
 Figure 9 is a fragmentary plan view similar to that shown in Figure 8, of a fifth embodiment of the invention;
 Figure 10 is a fragmentary sectioned view taken along the line X-X of Figure 9;
 Figure 11 is a fragmentary isometric view of a cuvette showing a sixth embodiment of the invention;
 10 Figure 12 is a sectioned view similar to that shown in Figure 10, of a seventh embodiment of the invention;
 Figure 13 is a fragmentary isometric view of an eighth embodiment of the invention, in association with a heater for the cuvette, shown here raised;
 Figure 14 is a fragmentary sectioned elevational view, taken along the line XIV-XIV of Figure 13 but with the heater lowered into contact with the cuvette;
 Figure 15 is a fragmentary sectioned view similar to that shown in Figure 10, but of a ninth embodiment of the invention;
 Figure 16 is an isometric view of the piece 500 shown in Figure 15; and
 Figure 17 is a fragmentary sectioned view similar to that shown in Figure 15, but of a tenth embodiment of the invention, wherein pinching off of flow has already been achieved.
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The invention is described for preferred embodiments in which nucleic acid is amplified and detected while completely contained, to prevent contamination, such as by using PCR amplification to detect DNA from a patient sample. In addition, it can be used in any flexible cuvette for any processing reaction whatsoever, whether or not nucleic acid is being amplified, provided there is a need to close off an access port prior to doing reactions.

The preferred method of amplification of the nucleic acid is PCR amplification, the details of which are set forth in EP-A-0 381 501.

The prior art form of the cuvette set forth in EP-A-0 381 501 can be briefly summarized as follows:

The cuvette 10 features flexible compartments, as shown in Figure 1, which cooperate with an external pressurizing means 60, such as a pressure roller. More particularly, cuvette 10 comprises two relatively thin sheets 12, 14 formed such as by molding to mate together with pockets or compartments and connecting passageways protruding from the plane of the contacting sheets, as is shown more clearly in Figure 2. The sheets are secured together at least along their outer periphery 16, and preferably at all points surrounding compartments or passageways, such as by heat- and/or ultrasonic pressure-sealing. A heat-activatable adhesive such as ethylene vinyl acetate is useful for such joining operation. A liquid injection access port 22 is the exception to the sealed periphery 16, for use with a mating pipette 24. Such port 22 optionally includes a rigid rim extending into it, within which a pipette 24 seats.

The compartments are as follows: compartment 26 is the reaction compartment, and optionally has the amplifying reagents 28 pre-incorporated therein (Figure 2) in liquid or dried form. Compartment 30 (Figure 1) is a storage compartment for the first wash compartment containing wash water as a pre-incorporated reagent. Compartment 32 is a storage compartment containing at least one of the detection materials pre-incorporated therein. A biotinylated primer, having at one end a complementary nucleotide for attachment to the amplified DNA is placed in compartment 26, whereas compartment 32 stores a signal generating moiety, for example, avidin bound to the horseradish peroxidase discussed above. Storage compartment 34 is a second wash-containing storage compartment, which preferably has a much larger volume than the volume of storage compartment 32. Storage compartment 36 has pre-incorporated therein, the remaining detection reagents, namely a peroxide and a leuco dye, for example 2-(4-hydroxy-3,5-dimethoxyphenyl)-4,5-bis(4-methoxyphenyl)imidazole, preferably in combination with poly(vinyl pyrrolidone) as a stabilizer. Storage compartment 38 has pre-incorporated therein a stop solution to prevent too much leuco dye from converting to the dye, for example, a solution of sodium azide.

Finally, compartment 40 is the detection site, and compartment 42 is the waste compartment, preferably initially deflated to provide for expansion as liquid is forced into it. Compartment 42 connects to compartment 40 via passageway 43. Op-

tionally, a one-way check valve (not shown) can be included in passageway 44 to prevent waste liquid from backwashing into compartment 40, thus creating undesirable background color.

The interconnections are as follows: passageway 21 connects injection port 22 with compartment 26, passageway 44 connects reaction compartment 26 with detection compartment 40, except that a temporary seal is provided at 46 to keep introduced DNA in compartment 26 until pressure is generated by roller 60. Passageway 48 connects compartment 30, passageway 49 connects compartment 32, passageway 50 connects compartment 34, passageway 52 connects compartment 36 and passageway 54 connects compartment 38, all with detection compartment 40, again each preferably with a temporary seal 56, as shown in Figure 2, interrupting flow out of the respective compartment until roller 60 breaks the seal. Passageway 54 serves as the trunk line to which the other passageways 48, 49, 50 and 52 are joined.

The compartments are deliberately positioned, as shown in Figure 1, so that each one will empty into compartment 40 in the proper sequence as roller 60 advances along path A in the direction of arrows 63.

As noted above, care must be taken after the injection of patient sample, to seal off access port 22, as otherwise this becomes a path of leakage.

In accordance with the present invention, the problem with sealing the cuvette of the prior art, and specifically, the access port, is solved as follows (Figures 3 to 5). (In this description, parts identical to those previously described bear the same reference numeral, and those which are similar have the same reference numeral with "100" added).

Thus, cuvette 110 comprises a bottom sheet 12 and a top sheet 14, as shown in Figure 4, sealed together generally as discussed with reference to Figure 1. Compartments 26, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40 and 42 are provided, along with their interconnecting passageways 43, 44, 49, 49, 50, 52 and 54, as previously described. Temporary seals are formed at 46 and 56.

However, access port 122, as is shown more clearly in Figures 3 and 4, comprises a raised boss on sheet 14 having a central aperture 180 which fluidly connects to passageway 121 left unsealed in the seal between sheets 12 and 14. Passageway 121 extends from port 122 and aperture 180 first away, along portion 182, from the reaction compartment 26, and then it doubles back to that reaction compartment. Portion 182 extends into a closure portion 184 of the cuvette which is joined to the remainder of the cuvette only at a hinge line 190 (Figure 3) identified in Figure 4 by arrow 192. Hence, hinge line 190 cuts across portion 182 of

passageway 121 twice. Hinge line 190 extends from an outside edge 194 of cuvette 110 (Figure 3) to an end 196 where it joins a cut portion comprising a line of severance 198 extending completely through sheets 12 and 14 to isolate cover portion 184 except for hinge line 190. (Line of severance 198 is heat-sealed at 16, just as the rest of the periphery of the cuvette is sealed).

Portion 184 also includes a closure or cap means 200 projecting upward from sheet 14. Preferably, such means comprise a boss 202 having an aperture 204 which is closed off at its bottom by sheet 14, as shown in Figure 4. Given an outside diameter d_2 for port 122, the inside diameter d_1 of aperture 204 is selected to provide a friction fit of closure means 200 on port 122. However, this friction fit is not necessarily a seal, as will become apparent.

To seal off passageway 121 after patient sample is injected into compartment 26, closure portion 184 is bent about hinge line 192 (Figure 4) to cause closure means 200 to engage and cover the boss of port 122. (The heights of port 122 and boss 202 are exaggerated in Figure 4 for clarity. In reality they are reduced sufficiently to allow such connection.) This bending acts to pinch sheets 12 and 14 together across portion 182 of passageway 121, at two locations A and B, as shown in Figure 5, thus sealing off that passageway against leakage. The friction fit of closure means 200 is provided on port 122 only to ensure that, once covered, port 122 remains so covered. Other known alternative closure mechanisms can be used to keep closure means 200 covering port 122, for the duration of the test, or permanently if desired.

After sealing off passageway 121, roller 60 (Figure 3) can be passed over the non-cover portions of the cuvette to cause sequential release of the contents of the various compartments. Since only the cover portion of the cuvette is bent to seal off passageway 121, the roller does not have to press against access port 122 and its cover. Alternatively, not shown, cuvette 110 can be positioned between two plates provided with opposed pistons that press against the compartments to burst them in sequence.

It is not necessary that the cap be integral with the rest of the pouch, as that can be slipped over the access port separately, as shown in Figure 6. Parts similar to those previous described bear the same reference numeral to which the distinguishing suffix "A" is appended.

Thus, cuvette 110A has an access port 122A with an aperture 180A which feeds to a passageway portion 182A that passes through a hinge line, indicated by arrow 192A, around which closure portion 184A is folded to pinch closed passageway portion 182A. However, in this case, the closure

means comprises, in portion 184A, an aperture 204A, which extends completely through sheets 12A and 14A. The cover boss 202A is a cap piece separate from portion 184A. After aperture 204A is slipped around port 122A, in the direction of arrow 210A, cover 202A is also inserted over port 122A, as shown by arrows 310, thus completing the closure. However, cap 202A, as before, is not the means which seals off passageway portion 182A, since that occurs from the pinching of that portion at 192A. Rather, cap 202A serves to ensure that portion 184A stays in place on port 122A to maintain that pinching of portion 182A.

An additional option of the invention is to include an air vent passageway from the chamber into which the patient sample is injected, as shown in Figure 7. Parts similar to those previously described bear the same reference numeral, to which the distinguishing suffix "B" is appended.

Thus, in Figure 7, cuvette 110B includes an access port 122B wherein an aperture 180B connects to a feed passageway 121B which connects to a reaction compartment 26B having a sealed outlet passageway 44B. (Hatched portions represent the portions of the cuvette wherein the two opposed sheets are sealed together.) Closure portion 184B with aperture 204B features a hinge line 190B and a cut line 198B which allows closure aperture 204B to slip over portion 122B when portion 184B is folded about line 190B, as described heretofore. Because hinge line 190B passes through portion 182B of passageway 121B, the folding of portion 184B acts to pinch shut passageway 121B.

In addition, an air vent passageway 321 extends from compartment 26B back to a suitable vent aperture on the exterior surface 330 of pouch 110B, for example an aperture 340, or to the waste chamber (not shown here). Passageway 321 also extends across hinge line 190B so as to be pinched shut when the access passageway 121B is sealed. Although passageway 321 is shown as crossing hinge line 190B twice, it could cross only once, by locating aperture 340 at dotted position '340', for example.

It is not essential that the hinge line used to seal the sample injection passageway must cross that passageway twice. The cuvette can be constructed so that it crosses it once as shown in Figure 8. Parts similar to those previously described bear the same reference numeral, to which the distinguishing suffix "C" has been appended.

Thus, cuvette 110C is formed from two opposing sheets by sealing them together to leave a reaction compartment 26C connected to access port 122C and to other compartments via passageways 121C and 44C as previously described. Closure portion 184C is also formed by a line of

severance 198C and a hinge line 190C, also as previously described, so that port 122C can be inserted into a closure means 200C comprising a raised boss 202C also as previously described. However, the positions of port 122C and closure means 200C have been reversed, so that passageway 121C is crossed by hinge line 190C only once.

For the corner fold embodiment of Figure 8, it is not necessary that a portion of the cuvette be especially modified to allow hinging and folding to occur. Such modification, such as severance of the cuvette at an angle to the hinge line, can be eliminated if the pouch is constructed as shown in Figures 9 to 10. Parts similar to those previously described bear the same reference numerals, to which the distinguishing suffix "D" is appended.

Thus, cuvette 110D has an access port 122D that feeds into a passageway 121D extending to reaction compartment 26D, with hinge line 190D crossing passageway 121D at least one location, as described heretofore. Capping of the access port 122D to hold it in the folded-over, pinched-off condition, is provided, as before, by dead-end closure cap means 200D, to ensure that the pinching of passageway 121D by the folding at arrow 192D (see Figure 10) remains for the duration of the assay. However, unlike the previous embodiments, hinge line 190D extends at an angle α and γ to the two sides of the cuvette, rather than parallel to one of the sides, thereby allowing the hinging at line 190D to occur without having to sever the cuvette along a line intersecting the hinge line.

If for some reason, hinge line 190 cannot extend across a corner as shown in Figures 9 and 10, other ways can be provided to allow hinging and folding to occur, as shown in Figure 11, besides by severing the cuvette. Parts similar to those previously described bear the same reference numeral, to which the distinguishing suffix "E" is appended.

Thus, cuvette 110E comprises an access port 122E for feeding sample via a passageway 121E to reaction compartment 26E and beyond, as described heretofore, with a hinge line 190E crossing passageway 121E (here, at two locations) to pinch it off when portion 184E is folded over to allow capping shoulders 200E to friction fit over port 122E. However, to allow the folding over of portion 184E at line 190E, no severance of the cuvette is needed. Instead, portion 184E is joined to the rest of the cuvette by a flexible fan-fold 300, which allows portion 184E to be coplanar with the rest of the cuvette, or folded over in the direction of arrow 210E.

Still further, when fastening the folded-over portion in place to maintain the pinching of the passageway, it is not necessary that the friction-fitting cap engage the access port. Instead, it can

engage a dead-end boss provided for that purpose, as shown in Figure 12. Parts similar to those previously described bear the same reference numeral to which the distinguishing suffix "F" is appended.

Thus, in Figure 12, cuvette 110F is provided exactly as before, with a hinge line 190F crossing over passageway 121F (shown as a dotted line) that extends from access port 122F to the subsequent compartment(s) (not shown). Also as before, a cap 200F is provided on fold-over portion 184F to lock the latter to the rest of the cuvette with passageway 121F pinched off. However, unlike the previous embodiments, a dead-end boss 310 is provided separate from access port 122F, and it is this boss over which cap 200F is friction-forced to hold portion 184F in its folded-over configuration (shown in phantom).

Still further, it is not necessary that the hinge line, and subsequent pinching off, occur only across the passageway leading from the access port to the reaction compartment. It can also be used to pinch off unwanted flow away from the reaction or any other compartment during heating, downstream towards the detection compartment or site, as shown in Figures 13 and 14. Parts similar to those previously described bear the same reference numeral, to which the distinguishing suffix "G" is appended.

Thus, in Figure 13, cuvette 110G comprises the various compartments as described in previous embodiments, and connecting passageways. However, for each compartment which has to be heated, such as reaction compartment 26G, there is a temporary seal 46G which is intended to not leak during heating until a bursting pressure is applied. That seal is located opposite to any incoming passageway such as passageway 121G (none being present for reagent compartments). The difficulty is that, under some conditions, seal 46G can leak during heating, allowing liquid (patient sample or reagent, depending on the compartment involved) to prematurely pass on to detection sites in detection compartment 40G.

To avoid this, the hinge line of this embodiment of the invention, line 190G, is formed to cross the passageway extending downstream of the burstable seal - passageway 44G in the case of reaction compartment 26G. Furthermore, cuvette 110G is severed along line 198G to form a fold-over portion 184G located in the interior of the cuvette.

The operation is shown in Figure 14. Prior to placing a heater 400 in contact with the compartment to be heated, e.g., compartment 26G, a support 410 with a straight edge 412 is placed aligned with hinge line 190G. When heater 400 is lowered into contact, a pusher finger 420 on the heater folds portion 184G along the hinge line, pinching off the passageway downstream of the seal, thus

preventing liquid from prematurely entering the next compartment (e.g., compartment 40G), even if seal 46G should leak. In this operation, unlike the pinching off of the passageway from the access port, the pinching is temporary only and is released following heating to allow flow to occur once again (when the upstream compartment is deliberately burst immediately following the heating.)

The pinching shut of the passageway can be enhanced in several ways, by either the cuvette itself, or the processing apparatus. These are illustrated in Figures 15 to 17. Parts similar to those previously described bear the same reference numerals, to which the distinguishing suffixes "H" and "I" are appended, respectively.

Thus, in Figure 15, a corner fold such as is shown in Figures 9 and 10 can be enhanced by an inflexible fold bar disposed adjacent to the hinge line 190H, so that as the corner is folded over, the edge of the fold bar acts to further pinch shut the passageway. More specifically, device 110H is formed by opposing sheets with a passageway 121H leading from inlet port 122H to a reaction compartment 26H, and a cap means 200H is provided to cover port 122H when folding occurs about hinge line 190H, in the direction of arrow 210H, as is described previously for the embodiment of Figures 9 and 10. Additionally, a relatively solid, inflexible member or piece of plastic 500 is inserted in corner portion 184H, so that one of its edges 502 is beveled at 504 to form a relatively sharp edge, as shown in Figure 16. Passageway 121H in turn is formed over piece 500, either by dimpling sheet 14H to preform a channel, or by grooving piece 500 as suggested by the phantom lines in Figure 16.

When portion 184H is folded over hinge line 190H, in the direction of arrow 210H, piece 500 acts to enhance the pinching off of passageway 121H at line 190H, as will be readily appreciated.

Alternatively, not shown, piece 500 can be replaced by an inflexible member such as a bar placed on the exterior of the pouch, rather than in the interior, to extend with an edge adjacent the fold line.

Figure 15 also illustrates that the cap means can have thicknesses in excess of the thickness of the single sheet 14H, e.g., base 506 of cap 200H is thicker than the thickness of sheet 14H, as are the sidewalls 508. This is readily achieved by manufacturing cap 200H as a separate component and then adhesively securing it to sheet 14H in the position shown.

A similar increase can be achieved in the sidewalls of port 122H.

As is noted above, an external pressure member such as a roller is used to burst at least the reaction compartment after suitable reactions oc-

cur. This roller can also be useful in enhancing the pinching off of the passageway, as shown in Figure 17. In such an embodiment, cuvette 110I features an inlet or access port 122I, a cap means 200I, a passageway (not shown) extending between sheets 14I and 12I to a burstable compartment 26I, and a hinge line 190I about which corner portion 184I can be folded to pinch off the passageway, as described heretofore. (Unlike previous embodiments, port 122I and cap means 200I project from the cuvette in a direction opposite to the projection of compartment 26I, as a further option.) Most preferably, cuvette 110I is processed on a support 510 having a recess 512 that accommodates the protrusion of port 122I and cap means 200I, and a roller 60I used to burst compartment 26I is also used to enhance the pinching off of flow in the passageway by creasing with pressure, the hinge line 190I. Once the creasing by roller 60I is achieved, it can be rolled on to burst compartment 26I since the crease at hinge line 190I is effective to hold the passageway pinched off. This embodiment can be used with or without the enhancer shown in Figures 15 to 16.

Claims

1. A flexible cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) comprising:-
opposed flexible sheets (12, 14; 12A, 14A; 12H; 12I, 14I) sealed together to define at least one compartment (26; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26G; 26H; 26I) between them for holding a liquid and
a passageway (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) in said cuvette (110, 110A, 110B, 110C, 110D, 110E, 110F, 110G, 110H, 110I) leading to or from the one compartment (26; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26G; 26H; 26I);
characterized in that sealing means (184, 200, 202, 204; 184A, 202A, 204A; 184B, 204B; 184C, 200C, 202C; 200D; 184E, 200E, 300; 184F, 200F, 310; 184G; 184H, 200H, 500, 502, 506, 508; 184I, 200I) are provided for sealing off flow through the passageway (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I), the sealing means (184, 200, 202, 204; 184A, 202A, 204A; 184B, 204B; 184C, 200C, 202C; 200D; 184E, 200E, 300; 184F, 200F, 310; 184G; 184H, 200H, 500, 502, 506, 508; 184I, 200I) comprising a fold line (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I) in said cuvette (110, 110A, 110B, 110C, 110D, 110E, 110F, 110G, 110H, 110I) extending across the passageway (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) at

at least one location so that the cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) can be folded about the fold line (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I) sufficiently to pinch off flow through the passageway (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I), and retaining means (184, 200, 202, 204; 184A, 202A, 204A; 184B, 204B; 184C, 200C, 202C; 200D; 184E, 200E, 300; 184F, 200F, 310; 184G; 184H, 200H, 500, 502, 506, 508; 184I, 200I) for retaining the folded condition for as long as necessary.

2. A cuvette according to claim 1, further including a portion (184; 184A; 184B; 184C; 184F; 184G) of the cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110F; 110G) being severed along a line (198; 198A; 198B; 198C; 198F; 198G) which is angled to the fold line (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190F; 190G).

3. A cuvette according to claim 1 or 2, wherein an inlet port (122; 122A; 122B; 122C; 122D; 122E; 122F; 122G; 122H; 122I) is connected via the passageway (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) to the compartment (26; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26G; 26H; 26I), and wherein the retaining means (184, 200, 202, 204; 184A, 202A, 204A; 184B, 204B; 184C, 200C, 202C; 200D; 184E, 200E, 300; 184F, 200F, 310; 184G; 184H, 200H, 500, 502, 506, 508; 184I, 200I) includes portions on opposite sides of the fold line (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190F; 190G) which are mutually engageable to lock the portions together and to retain the folded condition.

4. A cuvette according to claim 3, wherein one of the retaining portions comprises the inlet port (122; 122A; 122B; 122C; 122D; 122E; 122F; 122G; 122H; 122I) and the other of the retaining means comprises a cap (200, 202, 204; 204B; 200C, 202C; 200D; 200E; 200F; 200H, 506, 508; 200I) for the port (122; 122B; 122C; 122D; 122E; 122F; 122H; 122I).

5. A cuvette according to any one of claims 2 to 4, further including an additional compartment (40G) within the cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110F; 110G), the passageway (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) extending between the compartments, and a temporary seal (46G) being provided at the juncture of the passageway with the one compartment (26G).

5. A cuvette according to any one of claims 2 to 5, further including an inflexible pinch member (500, 502, 504) extending adjacent to the fold line (190H) across the passageway (121H) of a shape and material effective to assist the pinching off of flow when the cuvette (110H) is folded about the fold line (190H).

7. A cuvette according to any one of the preceding claims, further including an air vent passageway (321, 340, 340') extending from a compartment (26B) of the cuvette (110B) to the exterior of the cuvette (110B), a portion of the air vent passageway (321, 340, 340') extending through the fold line (190B) so that the air vent passageway (321, 340, 340') is sealed shut when the cuvette (110B) is folded about the fold line (190B).

8. A method for sealing off flow through a passageway (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) in a flexible cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) to or from a compartment (26; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26G; 26H; 26I) in said cuvette, the method comprising the steps of:-

a) providing a fold line (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I) in said cuvette extending across the passageway (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) at least once,

b) folding the cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) about the fold line (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I) so as to pinch off flow through the passageway (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I), and

c) holding the cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) folded as set forth in step b) with retaining means for as long as flow is to be sealed off through the passageway (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I).

9. A method according to claim 8, further including, prior to step b), the step of:-

a') rendering a fold portion (184; 184A; 184B; 184C; 184E; 184F; 184H; 184I) of the cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110H; 110I) spaced away from the passageway (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121H; 121I) bendable out of the plane of the cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110H;

110I), the fold portion (184; 184A; 184B; 184C; 184E; 184F; 184H; 184I) extending from an outside edge of the cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110H; 110I) up to the fold line (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190H; 190I). 5

10. A method according to claim 9, wherein the step a') comprises severing the cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110F; 110H; 110I) along a line (198; 198B; 198C) extending at an angle to the fold line (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190H; 190I). 10

11. A method according to any one of claims 8 to 10, further including the step of:-
d) heating the compartment (26G), the folding step occurring prior to or simultaneously with the application of the heating step and lasts for at least the duration of the heating so that any inadvertent leakage out of the compartment (26G) due to the heating is prevented. 15

12. A method according to claim 11, and further including the subsequent step of unfolding the cuvette (110G) about the fold line (190G) so as to open up the passageway (121G) for flow following the application of heat. 20

13. A method according to claim 8, wherein the compartment (26; 26A; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26F; 26G; 26H; 26I) is burstable, and further including the step of applying pressure to the compartment (26; 26A; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26F; 26G; 26H; 26I) by a pressure applicator (60; 60I), and wherein the pressure applicator (60; 60I) is applied to the fold line (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190H; 190I) to enhance the pinching off of flow. 25

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dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß zum dichten Verschließen des Durchgangs (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) eine Abdichteinrichtung (184, 200, 202, 204; 184A, 202A, 204A; 184B, 204B; 184C, 200C, 202C; 200D; 184E, 200E, 300; 184F, 200F, 310; 184G; 184H, 200H, 500, 502, 506, 508; 184I, 200I) vorgesehen ist, wobei die Abdichteinrichtung (184, 200, 202, 204; 184A, 202A, 204A; 184B, 204B; 184C, 200C, 202C; 200D; 184E, 200E, 300; 184F, 200F, 310; 184G; 184H, 200H, 500, 502, 506, 508; 184I, 200I) eine Faltlinie (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I) in der Küvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I), die an wenigstens einer Stelle quer über den Durchgang (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) verläuft, so daß die Küvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) ausreichend um die Faltlinie (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I) geklappt werden kann, um einen Fluß durch den Durchgang (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) abzuschnüren, und eine Halteeinrichtung (184, 200, 202, 204; 184A, 202A, 204A; 184B, 204B; 184C, 200C, 202C; 200D; 184E, 200E, 300; 184F, 200F, 310; 184G; 184H, 200H, 500, 502, 506, 508; 184I, 200I) zum Halten des gefalteten Zustandes so lange wie nötig umfaßt. 20

2. Küvette nach Anspruch 1, wobei ein Abschnitt (184; 184A; 184B; 184C; 184F; 184G) der Küvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110G) längs einer Linie (198; 198A; 198B; 198C; 198F; 198G) eingeschnitten ist, die zu der Faltlinie (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190F; 190G) in einem Winkel liegt. 25

3. Küvette nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, wobei eine Eingabeöffnung (122; 122A; 122B; 122C; 122D; 122E; 122F; 122G; 122H; 122I) über den Durchgang (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) mit der Kammer (26; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26G; 26H; 26I) verbunden ist, und wobei die Halteeinrichtung (184, 200, 202, 204; 184A, 202A, 204A; 184B, 204B; 184C, 200C, 202C; 200D; 184E, 200E, 300; 184F, 200F, 310; 184G; 184H, 200H, 500, 502, 506, 508; 184I, 200I) an gegenüberliegenden Seiten der Faltlinie (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190F; 190G) Abschnitte aufweist, die gegenseitig in Eingriff kommen können, um die Abschnitte miteinander zu verbinden und den gefalteten Zustand aufrechtzuerhalten. 30

Patentansprüche

- Flexible Küvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) mit gegenüberliegenden flexiblen Schichten (12, 14; 12A, 14A; 12H; 12I, 14I), die miteinander dicht verbunden sind, um dazwischen wenigstens eine Kammer (26; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26G; 26H; 26I) zur Aufnahme einer Flüssigkeit zu bilden, und mit einem Durchgang (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) in der Küvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I), der zu oder von der einen Kammer (26; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26G; 26H; 26I) hin oder weg führt;

4. Küvette nach Anspruch 3, wobei der eine Teil der Halteabschnitte die Eingabeöffnung (122; 122A; 122B; 122C; 122D; 122E; 122F; 122G; 122H; 122I) und der andere Teil der Halteabschnitte eine Abdeckung (200, 202, 204; 204B; 200C, 202C; 200D; 200E; 200F; 200H, 506, 508; 200I) für die Eingabeöffnung (122; 122B; 122C; 122D; 122E; 122F; 122H; 122I) umfaßt. 5

5. Küvette nach einem der Ansprüche 2 bis 4, mit einer zusätzlichen Kammer (40G) in der Küvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110F; 110G), wobei sich der Durchgang (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) zwischen den Kammern erstreckt, und wobei an der Einmündung des Durchganges in die eine Kammer (26G) eine vorübergehende Abdichtung (46G) vorgesehen ist. 10

6. Küvette nach einem der Ansprüche 2 bis 5, mit einem starren Abschnürelement (500, 502, 504), das sich angrenzend an die Faltlinie (190H) über den Durchgang (121H) erstreckt und das von einer Form und aus einem Material ist, die bzw. das das Abschnüren des Fluxes unterstützt, wenn die Küvette (110H) um die Faltlinie (190H) umgeklappt wird. 15

7. Küvette nach einem der vorstehenden Ansprüche, mit einem Entlüftungsdurchgang (321, 340, 340'), der sich von einer Kammer (26B) der Küvette (110B) zur Außenseite der Küvette (110B) erstreckt, wobei ein Abschnitt des Entlüftungsdurchganges (321, 340, 340') über die Faltlinie (190B) verläuft, so daß der Entlüftungsdurchgang (321, 340, 340') dicht verschlossen ist, wenn die Küvette (110B) an der Faltlinie (190B) gefaltet ist. 20

8. Verfahren zum Abdichten eines Fluxes durch einen Durchgang (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) in einer flexiblen Küvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) zu oder von einer Kammer (26; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26G; 26H; 26I) in der Küvette, wobei das Verfahren umfaßt 25

- a) das Vorsehen einer Faltlinie (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I) in der Küvette, die wenigstens einmal über den Durchgang (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) verläuft,
- b) das Falten der Küvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) an der Faltlinie (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I), so daß ein Fluß durch den Durchgang (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) abgeschnürt wird, und
- c) das Gefaltet-Halten der Küvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) gemäß Schritt b) mit einer Halteinrichtung solange, wie ein Fluß durch den Durchgang (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) abzudichten ist. 30

9. Verfahren nach Anspruch 8, wobei vor dem Schritt b)

- a') ein Faltabschnitt (184; 184A; 184B; 184C; 184E; 184F; 184H; 184I) der Küvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110H; 110I), der vom Durchgang (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121H; 121I) beabstandet ist, aus der Ebene der Küvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110H; 110I) heraus biegbar ist; wobei sich der Faltabschnitt (184; 184A; 184B; 184C; 184E; 184F; 184H; 184I) von einem Außenrand der Küvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110H; 110I) bis zur Faltlinie (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190H; 190I) erstreckt. 35

10. Verfahren nach Anspruch 9, wobei der Schritt a') das Einschneiden der Küvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110F; 110H; 110I) längs einer Linie (198; 198B; 198C) umfaßt, die unter einem Winkel zur Faltlinie (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190H; 190I) verläuft. 40

11. Verfahren nach einem der Ansprüche 8 bis 10, mit dem weiteren Schritt d) des Aufheizens der Kammer (26G), wobei der Faltschritt vor dem oder gleichzeitig mit dem Heizschritt erfolgt und wenigstens für die Dauer des Aufheizens anhält, so daß ein unbeabsichtigtes Abfließen aus der Kammer (26G) aufgrund des Aufheizens verhindert wird. 45

12. Verfahren nach Anspruch 11, mit dem Folgeschritt des Zurückfaltens der Küvette (110G) an der Faltlinie (190G), um den Durchgang (121G) nach dem Anwenden der Wärme zu öffnen. 50

13. Verfahren nach Anspruch 8, wobei die Kammer (26; 26A; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26F; 26G; 26H; 26I) aufbrechbar ist, mit dem Schritt des Aufbringens von Druck auf die Kammer (26; 26A; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26F; 26G; 26H; 26I) mit einem Druckapplikator (60; 60I), wobei der Druckapplikator (60; 60I) auf die Faltlinie (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190H; 55

190I) angewendet wird, um das Abschnüren des Flusses zu erhöhen.

Revendications

1. Cuvette souple (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) comportant : des feuilles souples opposées (12, 14; 12A, 14A; 12H; 12I; 14I) réunies de manière étanche pour définir au moins un compartiment (26; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26G; 26H; 26I) entre celles-ci pour retenir un liquide et un passage (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) de ladite cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) aboutissant audit au moins un compartiment (26; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26G; 26H; 26I) ou provenant de celui-ci, caractérisée en ce que des moyens d'étanchéité (184, 200, 202, 204; 184A, 202A, 204A; 184B, 204B; 184C, 200C, 202C; 200D; 184E, 200E, 300; 184F, 200F, 310; 184G; 184H, 200H, 500, 502, 506, 508; 184I, 200I) sont agencés pour couper l'écoulement à travers le passage (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I), les moyens d'étanchéité (184, 200, 202, 204; 184A, 202A, 204A; 184B, 204B; 184C, 200C, 202C; 200D; 184E, 200E, 300; 184F, 200F, 310; 184G; 184H, 200H, 500, 502, 506, 508; 184I, 200I) comportant une ligne de pli (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I) de ladite cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) s'étendant à travers le passage (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I), au niveau d'au moins un emplacement de sorte que la cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) peut être pliée autour de la ligne de pli (190; 190A; 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I) pour arrêter de manière suffisante par pincement l'écoulement à travers le passage (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I), et des moyens de maintien (184, 200, 202, 204; 184A, 202A, 204A; 184B, 204B; 184C, 200C, 202C; 200D; 184E, 200E, 300; 184F, 200F, 310; 184G; 184H, 200H, 500, 502, 506, 508; 184I, 200I) destinés à maintenir l'état plié aussi longtemps que nécessaire.
2. Cuvette selon la revendication 1, comportant en outre une partie (184; 184A; 184B; 184C; 184F; 184G) de la cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110G) découpée le long d'une ligne (198; 198A; 198B; 198C; 198F; 198G) qui est inclinée par rapport à la ligne de pli (190;

190A; 190B; 190C; 190F; 190G).

3. Cuvette selon la revendication 1 ou 2, dans laquelle un orifice d'entrée (122; 122A; 122B; 122C; 122D; 122E; 122F; 122G; 122H; 122I) est relié via le passage (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) au compartiment (26; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26F; 26G; 26H; 26I) et dans laquelle les moyens de retenue (184, 200, 202, 204; 184A, 202A, 204A; 184B, 204B; 184C, 200C, 202C; 200D; 184E, 200E, 300; 184F, 200F, 310; 184G; 184H, 200H, 500, 502, 506, 508; 184I, 200I) comportent des parties situées sur des côtés opposés de la ligne de pli (190; 190A, 190B; 190C; 190F; 190G) qui peuvent venir en prise mutuellement pour verrouiller ensemble les parties et pour maintenir l'état plié.
4. Cuvette selon la revendication 3, dans laquelle une des parties de retenue constitue l'orifice d'entrée (122; 122A; 122B; 122C; 122D; 122E; 122F; 122G; 122H; 122I) et l'autre des moyens de retenue constitue un bouchon (200, 202, 204; 204B; 200C, 202C; 200D; 200E; 200F; 200H, 506, 508; 200I) pour l'orifice (122; 122B; 122C; 122D; 122E; 122F; 122H; 122I).
5. Cuvette selon l'une quelconque des revendications 2 à 4, comportant en outre un compartiment supplémentaire (40G) situé à l'intérieur de la cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110F; 110G), le passage (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) s'étendant entre les compartiments, et un joint temporaire (46G) agencé au niveau de la jonction du passage avec le au moins un compartiment (26G).
6. Cuvette selon l'une quelconque des revendications 2 à 5, comportant en outre un élément de pincement rigide (500, 502, 504) s'étendant adjacent à la ligne de pli (190H) à travers le passage (121H), constitué d'une forme et d'un matériau efficace pour aider à l'arrêt par pincement de l'écoulement lorsque la cuvette (110H) est pliée autour de la ligne de pli (190H).
7. Cuvette selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, comportant en outre un passage (321, 340, 340') de mise à l'air libre s'étendant à partir d'un compartiment (26B) de la cuvette (110B) vers l'extérieur de la cuvette (110B), une partie du passage de mise à l'air libre (321, 340, 340') s'étendant à travers la ligne de pli (190B) de telle sorte que le passage de mise à l'air libre (321, 340, 340') soit

fermé de manière étanche lorsque la cuvette (110B) est pliée autour de la ligne de pli (190B).

8. Procédé pour arrêter de manière étanche l'écoulement à travers un passage (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) situé dans une cuvette souple (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) vers un compartiment (26; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26G; 26H; 26I) de ladite cuvette ou à partir de celui-ci, le procédé comportant les étapes consistant à :

a) fournir une ligne de pli (190; 190A, 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I) de la cuvette traversant au moins une fois le passage (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I),

b) plier la cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) autour de la ligne de pli (190; 190A, 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I) de manière à arrêter par pincement l'écoulement à travers le passage (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I), et

c) maintenir la cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) pliée comme indiqué dans l'étape b) à l'aide de moyens de retenue, aussi longtemps que l'écoulement doit être arrêté à travers le passage (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I).

9. Procédé selon la revendication 8, comportant en outre, avant l'étape b), l'étape consistant à :

a') amener une partie pliée (184; 184A; 184B; 184C; 184E; 184F; 184H; 184I) de la cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) éloignée du passage (121; 121A; 121B; 121C; 121D; 121E; 121F; 121G; 121H; 121I) à pouvoir être courbée vers l'extérieur du plan de la cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) la partie pliée (184; 184A; 184B; 184C; 184E; 184F; 184H; 184I) s'étendant à partir d'un bord extérieur de la cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) jusqu'à la ligne de pli (190; 190A, 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I).

10. Procédé selon la revendication 9, dans lequel l'étape a') consiste à découper la cuvette (110; 110A; 110B; 110C; 110D; 110E; 110F; 110G; 110H; 110I) le long d'une ligne (198; 198B; 198C) s'étendant en formant un angle par rapport à la ligne de pli (190; 190A, 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190G; 190H; 190I).

11. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications 8 à 10, comportant en outre l'étape consistant à :

d) chauffer le compartiment (26G), l'étape de pliage survenant avant l'application de l'étape de chauffage ou simultanément à cette dernière et durant au moins la durée du chauffage de sorte que toute fuite par inadvertance vers l'extérieur du compartiment (26G), due au chauffage, est empêchée.

12. Procédé selon la revendication 11, et comportant en outre l'étape ultérieure consistant à déplier la cuvette (110G) autour de la ligne de pli (190G) de manière à ouvrir le passage (121G) pour écoulement après l'application de chaleur.

13. Procédé selon la revendication 8, dans lequel le compartiment (26; 26A; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26F; 26G; 26H; 26I) peut éclater et comportant en outre l'étape consistant à appliquer une pression sur le compartiment (26; 26A; 26B; 26C; 26D; 26E; 26F; 26G; 26H; 26I) par un applicateur de pression (60; 60I) et dans lequel l'applicateur de pression (60; 60I) est appliqué sur la ligne de pli (190; 190A, 190B; 190C; 190D; 190E; 190F; 190H; 190I) pour renforcer l'arrêt par pincement de l'écoulement.

FIG. 1 (PRIOR ART)

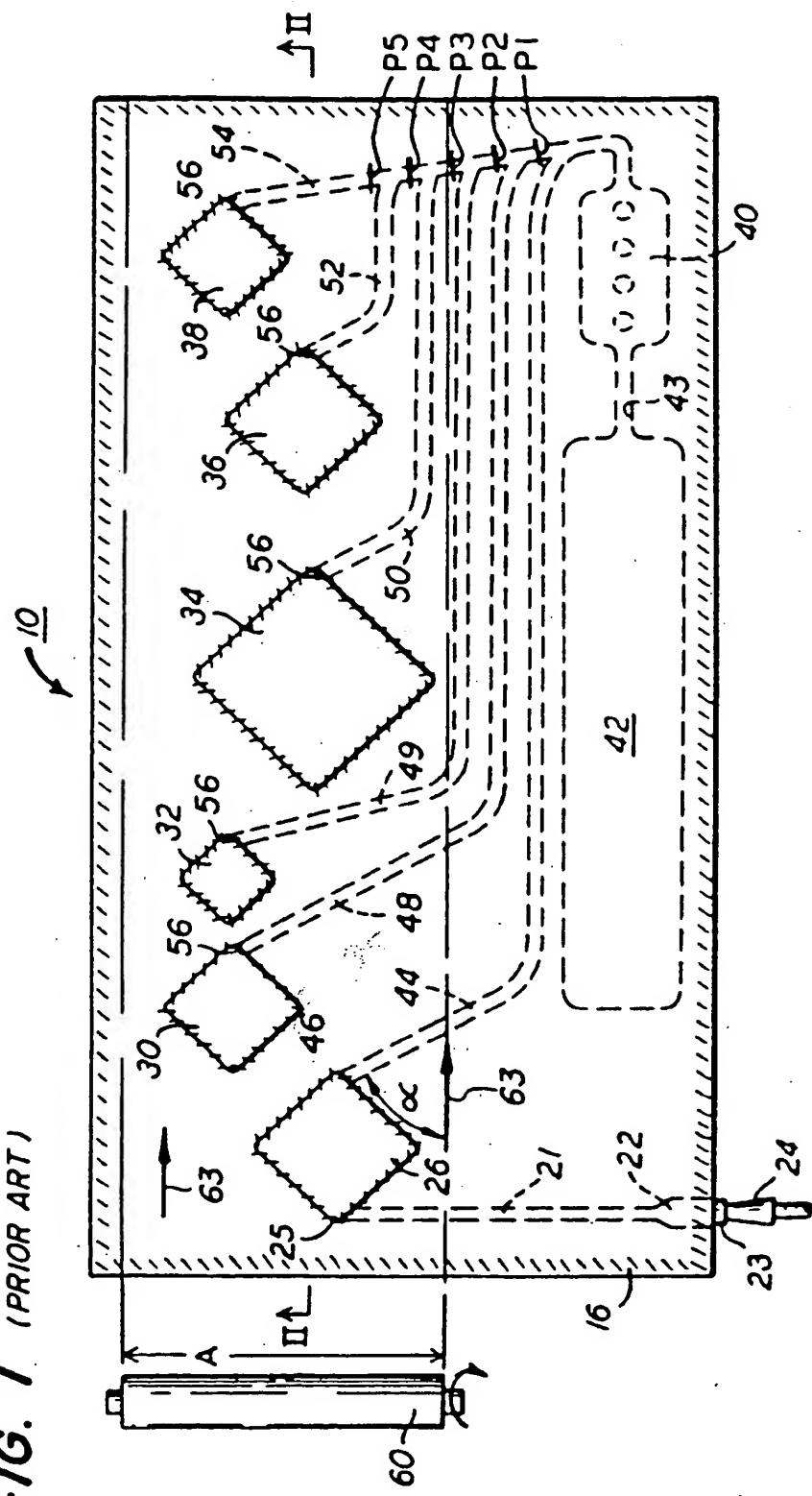
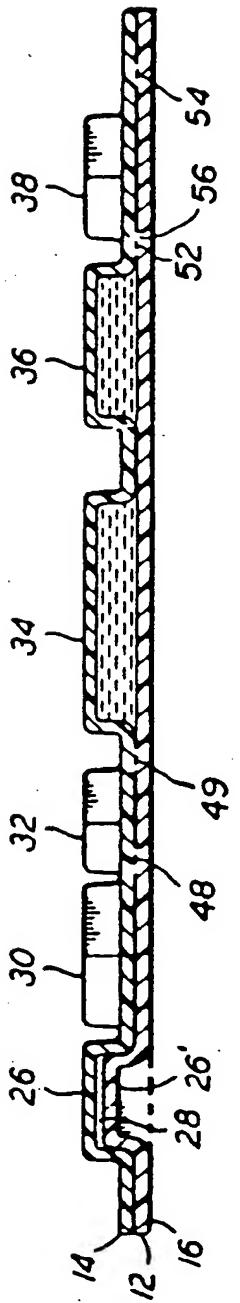


FIG. 2
(PRIOR ART)



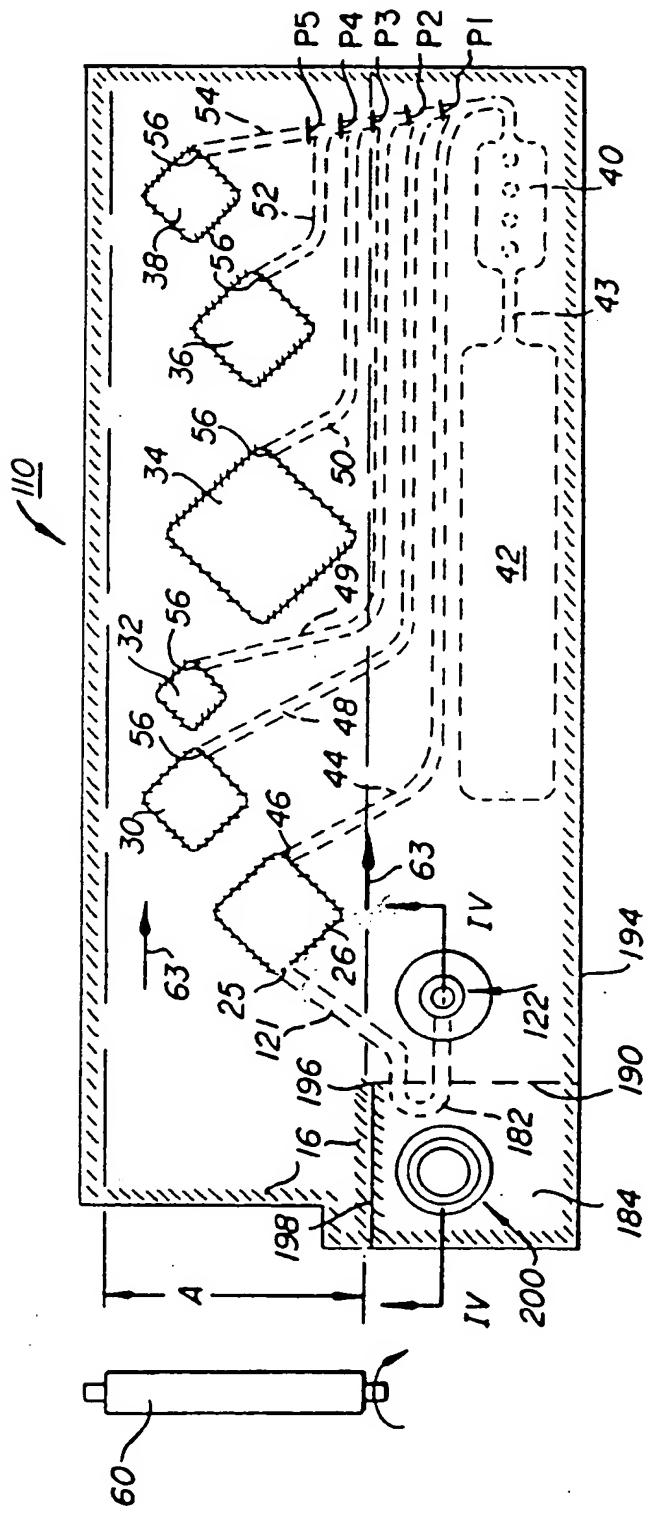
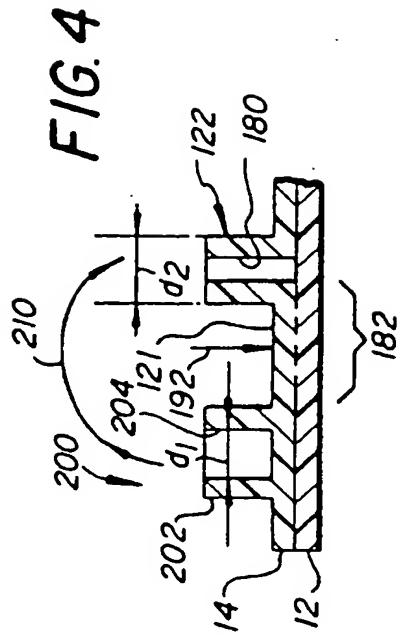


FIG. 3



- 1 -

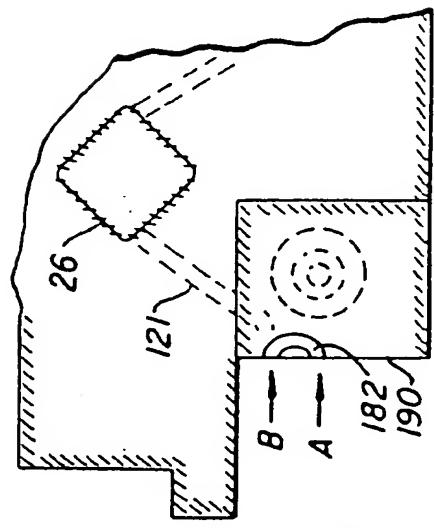


FIG. 5

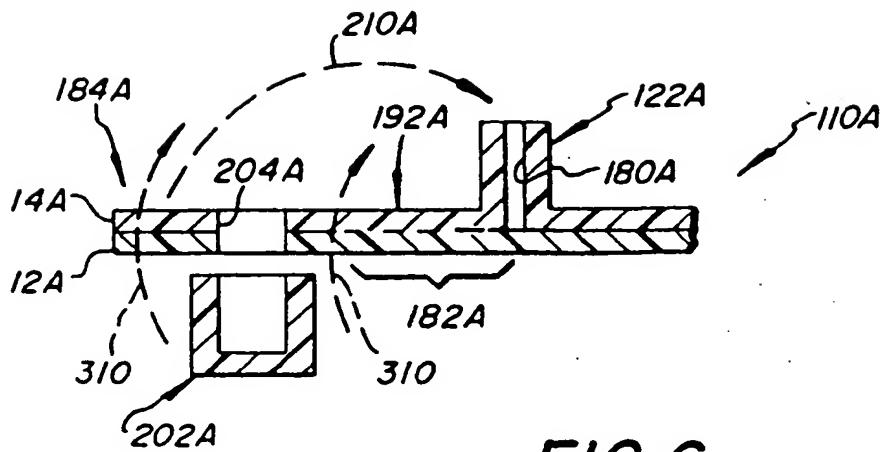


FIG. 6

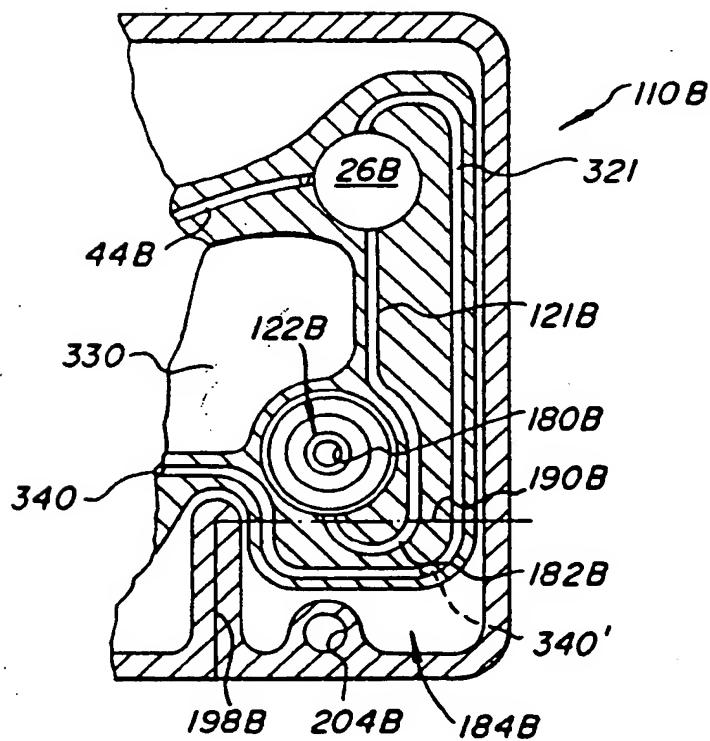


FIG. 7

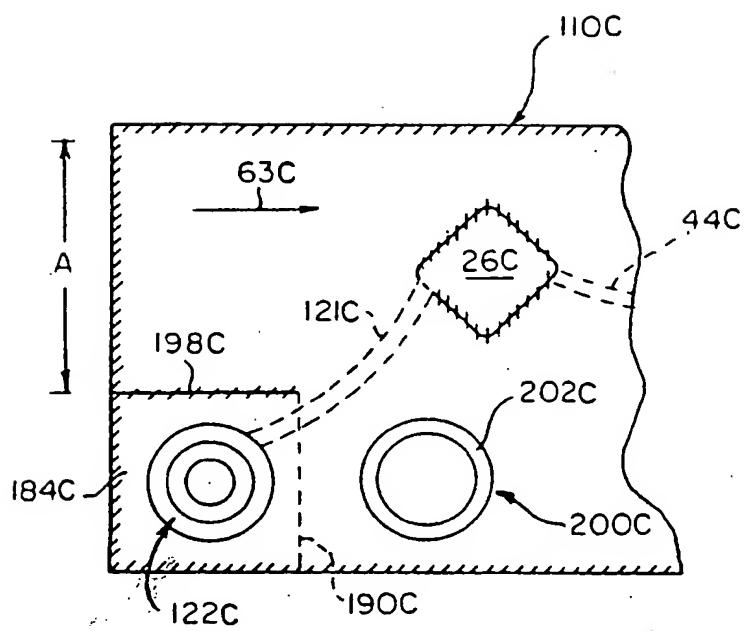


FIG. 8

FIG. 9

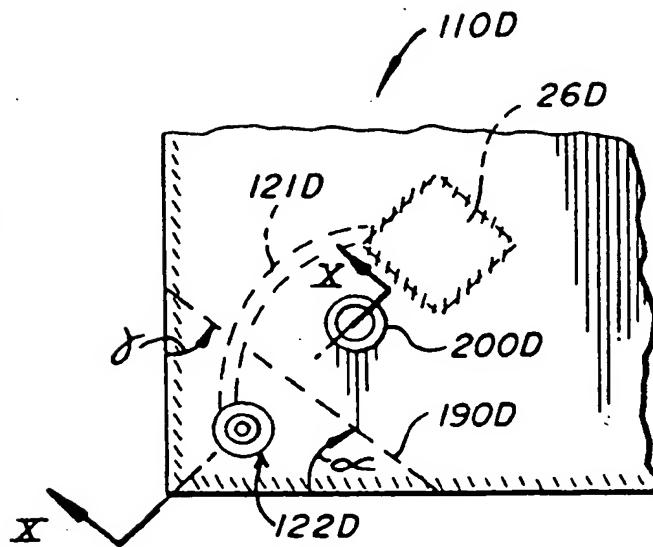


FIG. 10

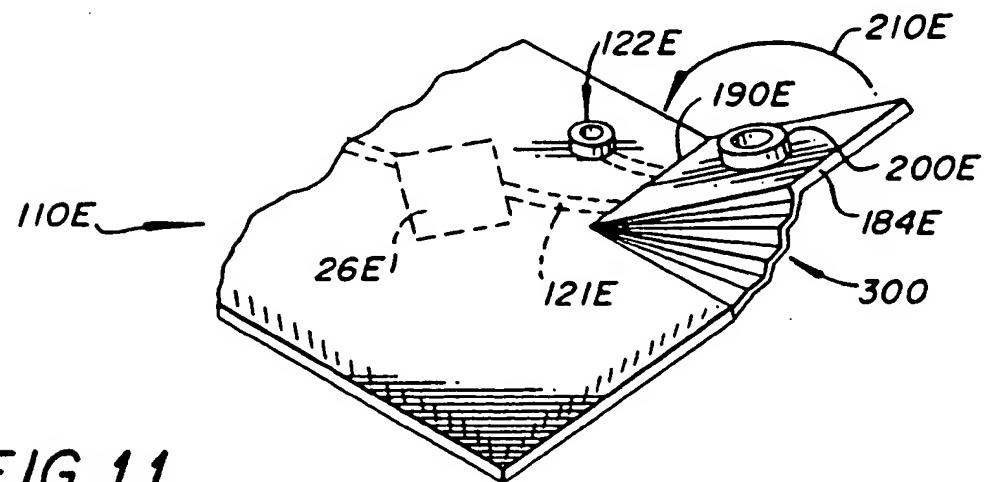
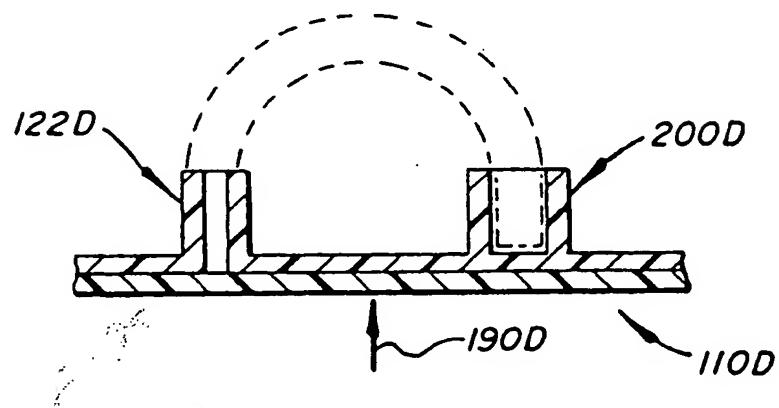


FIG. 11

FIG. 12

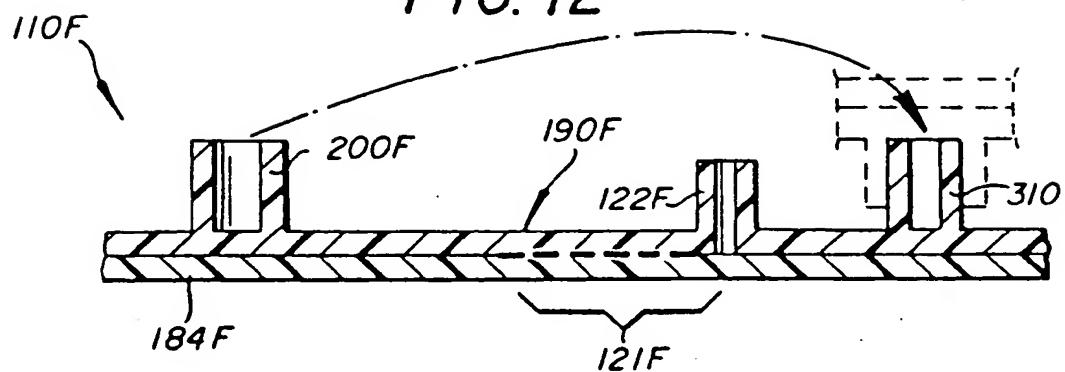


FIG. 13

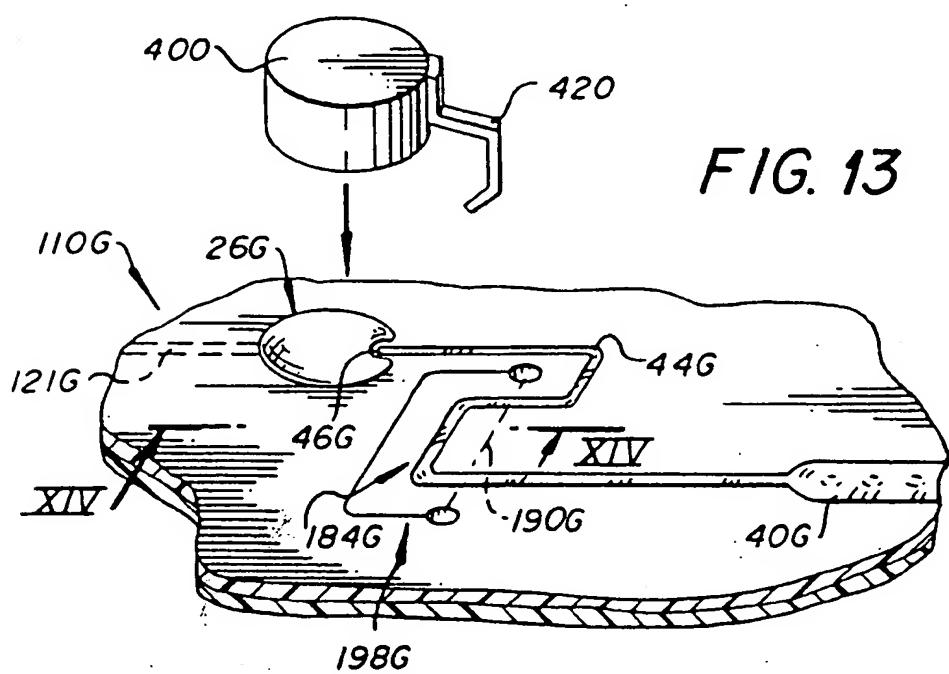


FIG. 14

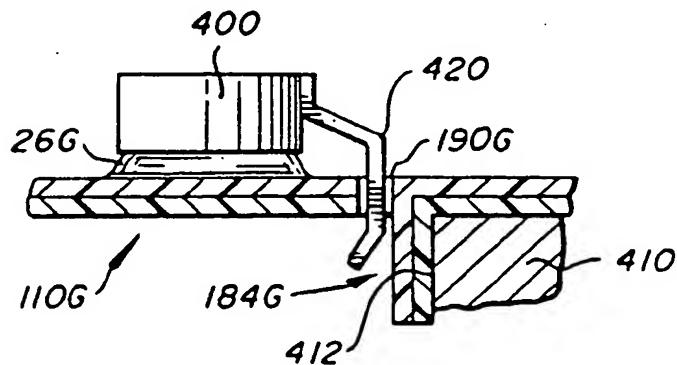


FIG. 15

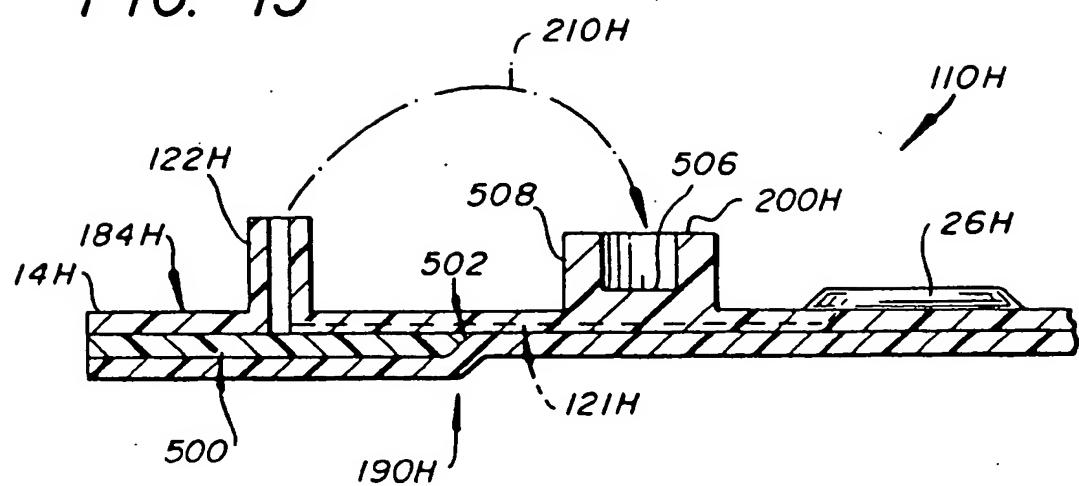


FIG. 17

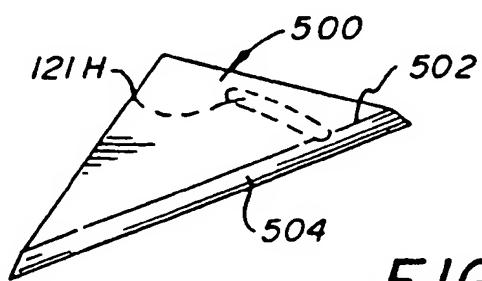
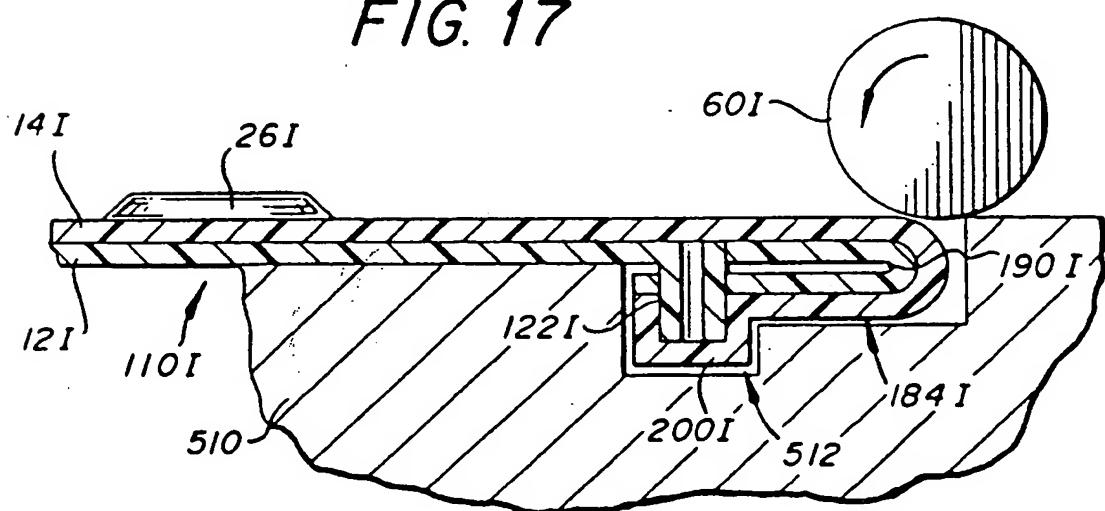


FIG. 16